

culture and values. But the United States can do little to halt its spread and has no reason to intentionally antagonize Muslims who otherwise wouldn't even think about America. Yet Washington is speaking of alliances with African nations that most policymakers, let alone citizens, can't find on a map, in order to "contain" an ancient religion that has endured for centuries. Declaring a de facto war on Islam invites retaliation, and the most likely victims will be innocent Americans.

Yes, the United States must respond to terrorism. Part of the solution is improved

detection, prevention, and punishment. But the United States must also reduce the manifold justifications, perverse and warped though they be, for terrorism that it has needlessly provided to those with seared consciences and murderous intentions. There are many good reasons why people both fear and criticize government. So long as Washington tolerates, encourages, and, worse, engages in one or another variant of terrorism, it will risk repetitions not only of Oklahoma City, but also of the plethora of other bloody attacks around the globe in recent years. □

## Crime and Race

by Ralph R. Reiland

**T**he tragic murder last year of Polly Klaas, a suburban white child forcibly taken from her bedroom by a career criminal, created a national uproar. Her accused assailant, Richard Allen Davis, had been released from prison two months earlier, after serving only half of his sentence for a prior kidnapping.

The Polly Klaas case isn't unique. A recent study from the Bureau of Justice Statistics on early release practices in 36 states and the District of Columbia shows violent offenders serve only 37 percent of their imposed sentences. The average time served for murder is 5.5 years (in California, it's 41 months). For robbery, it's 2.2 years, and 1.3 years for assault. And government statistics show that the majority of early release violent offenders are rearrested for new crimes within three years, one-third of them for new violent crimes.

*Professor Reiland teaches economics at Robert Morris College and has been published in National Minority Politics, Barron's, and USA Today.*

However, there's not the same national outrage when the victim is poor and black. "All the murders of inner-city black children at the hands of plea-bargained violent predators elicit no such political response," says John J. DiIulio, Professor of Politics and Public Affairs at Princeton University.

In fact, no group suffers more from lenient early release practices than America's black community. "He would be alive today if the legal system worked the way it should," said Hubert Stone, Sheriff of Robeson County, N.C. Sheriff Stone was talking to Michael Jordan, the Chicago Bull's basketball star, as he buried his father. The two 18-year-olds charged in the killing had long criminal histories at the time of the murder. Larry Demery, out on bail, was awaiting trial for bashing Mrs. Wilma Dial, a 61-year-old convenience store clerk, in the head with a concrete block during a robbery, causing a brain hemorrhage and fracturing her skull. Daniel Green was on parole after serving only two years of a six-year sentence for attempting to kill Robert Ellison by smash-

ing him in the head with an ax and putting him in a coma for three months.

A black person is murdered in the United States every 42 minutes. The FBI's current Uniform Crime Report shows that blacks, 12 percent of the population, account for over half of all murder victims (with 95 percent being killed by blacks). "We would riot if whites killed this many blacks," says Issac Fulwood, former Chief of Police in Washington, D.C.

In Pittsburgh and surrounding Allegheny County, blacks make up 11 percent of the population and accounted for 74 percent of the homicide victims in 1993 and 65 percent in 1994. Young black males, less than 1 percent of Allegheny County's population, account for nearly one-third of the murder victims. "For a 15-year-old black male in Allegheny County—and there are only about 1,000—the chances of being a homicide victim, most likely from a gun, before reaching the age of 25 are about 1 in 32," reports *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. The chances, by contrast, for a white 15-year-old male are 1 in 1,000.

Federal Judge Frank Easterbrook links the epidemic of crime to the fact that many people figure they can get away with it. "If you raise the price of rutabagas, people will buy fewer rutabagas," he says. In a recent *Commentary* article, James Q. Wilson, Professor of Public Policy at UCLA, states: "The probability of being arrested for a given crime is lower today than it was in 1974. The amount of time served in state prison has been declining more or less steadily since the 1940s. Taking all crime together, time served fell from 25 months in 1945 to 13 months in 1984."

Alone, the criminal justice system can't be expected to get to the root of America's crime epidemic. It's just the last stop along a continuum of social problems. "Street crime cannot be solved by the police, the courts, or prisons," writes Judge David Bazelon of the D.C. Court of Appeals. "Those institutions act as mere janitors, tidying up the wreckage that happens to end up in the courtroom."

The roots of crime are more basic. "We

no longer live nobly," says novelist John Updike. What we're witnessing is an extensive cultural decline and, unfortunately, much of the social regression seems impervious to government spending. Since 1960, with a population increase of 41 percent, government spending on welfare and education increased by 630 percent and 225 percent respectively (in real terms, adjusted for inflation). In the same 30-year period, SAT's fell by 80 points and violent crime increased by 560 percent.

Still, the vast majority of Americans think Daniel Green and Richard Allen Davis should have been in jail on the nights that Jordan and Klaas were killed. A recent *Parade* magazine survey shows that 92 percent of the public wants repeat serious offenders to serve all of their sentences without being paroled. "By requiring criminals to serve at least 85 percent of their sentenced time, we could prevent 4,400,000 violent crimes annually, nearly three-quarters of the total violent crimes committed," states James Wootton, President of the Safe Streets Alliance in Washington, D.C.

"A lot of blacks are very conservative about crime and that has to do with the fact that many of them are victims," says the Reverend Al Sharpton in a *New York Post* interview. In a recent Gallup survey, 74 percent of black respondents said parole should be more difficult to get, and 67 percent said youth offenders should be treated the same as adults.

Government experts and academics will debate about crime, and be well paid for it. Conservatives oppose judicial restraints on the police and courthouse mollicoddling. Liberals focus on racism and guns. Both worry about the impact of violent movies. Meanwhile, as the arguments continue and the grant money flows, the number of black males being killed every year is higher than the total number of black soldiers killed in the bloodiest decade of the Vietnam War.

It is time we remembered that, of all groups, it is blacks who are the worst victims of our crime epidemic. And it is time for us to understand that leniency toward criminals actually harms blacks the most. □

# The Uneasy Case for “Tax Fairness”

by Dale Bails

**H**ow should the tax burden be distributed? How much should one group or individual pay relative to some other group or individual? Both of these questions are usually answered by some vague reference to “fairness” and “equity.”

In common usage, equity in taxation implies that high-income individuals should pay more than middle-income individuals, and low-income individuals should pay the least. More formally, the issue of equitably distributing the tax burden among taxpayers has generally been resolved by applying the concept of the “ability-to-pay” principle of taxation. A shorthand statement of this principle would be “treat equals equally and unequals unequally.”

The issue of levying higher taxes on those with higher incomes is frequently cited as a justification for a progressive or graduated tax structure. Under such a structure, the more income an individual earns, the larger the tax bite out of any additional income. For example, if an individual earns \$30,000, the first \$10,000 might be taxed at a rate of 10 percent, the second \$10,000 at a tax rate of 15 percent, and the third \$10,000 at a tax rate of 25 percent. Thus, a person who earns \$30,000 will pay a total tax of \$5,000.

Although it is true that progressive taxes satisfy the higher tax requirement for those with higher incomes, there are fundamental

problems with this position. The requirement of higher taxes on higher incomes is also satisfied under a flat-rate tax where a single tax rate is applied to all income. In the case of the individual who earns \$30,000, the last \$1 earned would be taxed at exactly the same tax rate as the first dollar earned. If the single tax rate were set at 10 percent, the total tax bill would equal \$3,000. For a person who earns only \$20,000, the tax bill would equal \$2,000. The principle of treating unequals unequally requires only that those with higher incomes pay higher taxes, a condition that is satisfied under a flat-rate tax. It does not require that they face a higher tax rate. Those who justify progressive taxation by relying on the ability-to-pay principle demonstrate a complete lack of understanding of this principle.

Advocates of progressive taxation argue that individuals with larger incomes have more resources with which to pay taxes; thus, they place a lower value on the additional dollars that they earn (or that would be paid in taxes) than do lower-income individuals. If this argument is correct, levying a higher tax rate on those with higher incomes has some intuitive appeal.

However, the validity of this position rests critically upon two questionable assumptions: (1) the value of additional income to those who earn it must decline, (2) it must decline more rapidly as income increases. The value of the income earned by individuals is reflected in the goods and

---

*Dr. Bails is Executive Director of the Public Interest Institute at Iowa Wesleyan College in Mt. Pleasant, Iowa.*